

“Lord, Have Mercy!” (Luke 18:9-14)

Many of you know that I spent the last two weeks in classes in Southern California. I had a wonderful experience, but my time did not begin particularly well. I woke up on a Monday morning in Olympia at 4:30 and arrived on campus in Southern California at 4:30 in the afternoon. Upon my arrival, I was hot, sweaty, and anxious to shower. However, I learned that conference services did not know that my cohort was arriving. Consequently, our accommodations were not ready. After a couple of hours of waiting, I was given lodging. But it was a one-bedroom apartment. So the next day my roommate and I had to move all of our belongings to another apartment complex. Upon unpacking all of our belongings in our new apartment, we discovered that the lock on the door was not working. So we had to pack up and move again. By this time, I was beginning to feel my blood pressure rise. Impatience and irritability were welling up within me. So I decided to take out my frustration by lifting weights. As I walked into the fitness center, I was asked for my student ID card, which I displayed and then put back into my wallet. I then asked for a towel. One of the students working at the desk again asked for my student ID card and gave me a washcloth. That’s right...a washcloth! [Display a maroon washcloth.] Can you imagine having a body as massive as mine and having to use a washcloth to wipe yourself off?© Come on now! At this point, I snapped and curtly replied, “You’re telling me I have to give you my card for this washcloth and I can’t have my card back until I return the washcloth?” The poor student sheepishly looked up at me and said, “That’s right.” I then walked off shaking my head while staring at my washcloth in amazement. [This illustration will be picked up again in the conclusion.]

What kind of attitude does God commend? Have you ever pondered a similar question? Has anyone ever asked you this question? If you stop and think about it, this is one of the most important questions that can be asked and answered. If we cannot answer the question, “What kind of attitude does God commend?” we are missing out on one of the most important truths that we could ever implement. However, if we are able to answer and apply this question, we can experience all that God has for us.

Jesus has just finished a parable on persistent prayer (Luke 18:1-8). He is now going to answer the question that concludes that parable. The question reads like this: “When the Son of Man [Jesus] comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (18:8)¹ Another way of asking this question is: “What kind of attitude does God commend?” Jesus will provide the answer in Luke 18:9-14. However, first we must see what kind of attitude God reproves. In Luke 18:9-12, I want us to see that...

1. God reproves us when we exalt ourselves (18:9-12). Jesus sets up His parable by focusing on two men who go up to the temple to pray. The first man is arrogant and critical. Although he prays, his prayer does not please God. Before recording Jesus’ parable, Luke pinpoints the target audience of this parable.² In 18:9, Luke writes: “**And He [Jesus] also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves³ that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt⁴.**” Luke’s editorial remarks make it clear that Jesus’ words are like a heat-seeking missile aimed at all those who are self-sufficient, self-righteous, and critical.⁵ Although it is tempting to single-out the Pharisees as the culprits,⁶ the disciples have also been guilty of exhibiting a self-righteous attitude.⁷ Many modern-day disciples, like you and me, have also been guilty of these attitudes.

Have you ever trusted in your own righteousness, not in God’s mercy and grace? In your quest for godliness have you gauged your spirituality by how much you pray and read your Bible? Have you ever trusted in your superior parenting skills in raising your children? Have you ever been critical of anyone? Have you ever looked at people who don’t go to church and think you are better than they are because you go to church? Have you ever looked down on a homosexual, a convict, a person of another race, a divorcee, a single mom, a teenage mom, a handicapped person, or a homeless person?⁸ If you can answer “yes” to any of these questions, this parable is for you...and me.

In 18:10, Jesus sets the stage for His parable by identifying the two main characters. Jesus says, **“Two men went up⁹ into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.”** In biblical times, there could not have been two different men. This is the original “odd couple.” The Pharisee belonged to the most pious movement,¹⁰ while the tax collector was part of the most hated profession. Pharisees were members of one of the most important and influential religious parties of Judaism in the time of Jesus.¹¹ Yet, many Christians have given Pharisees a bad rap. However, we must understand that not all Pharisees were hypocritical or super legalistic; many were respectable God-fearers. Some even came to faith in Christ.¹² In Jesus’ day, His audience esteemed Pharisees. They were heroes of the people. They were seen as those who kept God’s law, prayed, and set an example of *external* righteousness. Pharisees can be likened to modern-day pastors, elders, prayer warriors, or Sunday school teachers.

Conversely, hearing the word “tax collector,” the audience would have felt disgust and betrayal. Tax collectors were the dregs of society, the scum of the Jewish earth. They were the IRS of the Roman government. Tax collectors would bid to collect taxes for the Roman government and then add a surcharge to pad their own purses. They would steal candy from a baby and a welfare check from their own mother. Since tax collectors worked for Rome, they were viewed as traitors to their own people.¹³ They were so despised they could not hold public office or even give testimony in a Jewish court of law because their word was considered worthless. Upon hearing this parable, Jesus’ audience may have wondered what a tax collector was doing in the temple. How could such a person become ritually clean enough to be allowed inside the temple? Regardless, the *character* of the two men in this parable is more important than their identity. Jesus looks into the heart of a man.¹⁴ Today, tax collectors can be likened to pimps, homosexuals, or abortionists.¹⁵

After setting the scene, Jesus begins His parable in 18:11-12 with the crowd favorite—the Pharisee—a member of the ancient “religious right.” This pious man is going to pray, “Lord, I thank you that I am such a great guy! I am far more spiritual than all of my contemporaries.” If he lived during our lifetime, he would have quoted Mac Davis’ country song: “Oh, Lord it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way. I can’t wait to look into the mirror; I get better looking each day. To know me is to love me. I guess I’m one *@#! of a man. Oh, Lord, it’s hard to be humble, but I’m doing the best that I can.” Jesus tells us that this Pharisee **“stood¹⁶ and was praying this to himself [or “about himself”]:¹⁷ ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people¹⁸: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’”** As we prepare to consider these recorded words, it is important to understand that the Pharisee did not pray these words out loud. He was too shrewd to say what he was thinking. Rather, these are the words that he *thought* to himself. But since Jesus knows the thoughts of men (Luke 5:22; 6:8; 12:16-19), He reveals the intents of this Pharisee’s heart.

In 18:11, the Pharisee’s prayer starts out well. He begins with thanksgiving to God, but the praise ends up not being about God. Instead, Jesus reveals that this Pharisee has an “I” problem. Five times in two verses you will see the little pronoun “I.” He is high on the drug of self. He suffers from two problems: inflation and deflation. He has an inflated view of who he is, and a deflated view of who God is. His gratitude to God is for *his* own virtues, not for *God’s* mercies to him.

This Pharisee makes two major mistakes. He compares himself to other men and he measures himself by his deeds. *First, in 18:11, he compares himself to other men.* This Pharisee does not compare himself to God or to God’s Word. Instead, he compares himself to those around him. And isn’t it interesting that he evaluates himself by the worst of those around him. He does not compare himself with another Pharisee; he selects a tax collector. Furthermore, the Pharisee mentions categories of sin that he is not guilty of. He then makes a judgment call and groups the tax collector in with the “swindlers, unjust, and adulterers.” This Pharisee knew that compared to other people he was exceptional. He had it together. Externally, he was godlier than the tax collector. Unfortunately, he was not defining what is godly by using God’s definition; he was using the world’s definition.

Have you ever felt smug because you have not committed adultery, yet your mind is filled with mental lust? Have you ever boasted that you have never laid a hand on one of your children, yet you verbally and emotionally abuse them? Have you ever looked down on an office gossip, yet you seethe inside with anger and bitterness toward your boss secretly wishing that the Lord would strike him dead? It is so easy to be guilty of this type of behavior. As C.S. Lewis once said, “A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and of course, as long as you are looking down, you can’t see something that’s above you.” Yet, this is the risk we run when we compare ourselves with other people and fail to compare ourselves with the perfect standard of Christ.

After he finished comparing himself to others, the Pharisee then measured himself by his deeds. In 18:12, after blackballing the tax collector and the rest of mankind, this Pharisee begins to praise his works of righteousness. Instead of worshipping God, he worships self. He performs two works that religious people find the most difficult: fasting and giving. Jesus records the Pharisee’s explanation: “I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.” The law only required fasting on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29; Num 29:7), yet he practiced voluntary fasting twice a week.¹⁹ He also tithes on all that he receives. The law only required a tenth of all his crops and produce; yet he also tithed on all his income.

This Pharisee was no spiritual slouch. He appeared impressive. On this basis he asserts his superiority over other people. He has gone beyond the call of duty, so God should be impressed with his record of service. Unfortunately, Jesus considers his approach offensive.²⁰ Like His Father, Jesus is repulsed by self-righteous arrogance. As He told this parable, Jesus may have reflected on Prov 6:16-19. In these verses, Solomon tells us that there are six things, which the Lord hates...seven which are an abomination to Him. Heading up the list is “haughty eyes,” or what we would call “pride.”²¹

What kind of attitude does God commend? We will see the answer to this question in just a moment. Thus far, we have seen that God reproves those who exalt themselves (18:9-12). We grieve the heart of God when we choose to have an inflated view of ourselves. We leave Him with no choice but to level us with His love. Now that we have seen what doesn’t win God’s favor, we will see the characteristic that does gain God’s favor. What kind of attitude does God commend? The next two verses tell us the answer.

2. God commends us when we humble ourselves (18:13-14). In 18:13-14, Jesus contrasts this Pharisee with a tax collector. In these two verses, He is going to shock His audience and maybe even some of us by informing us that God actually commends the tax collector. He looks upon him with pleasure and sends him home with His peace.

Take a look at the amazing words in 18:13: **“But²² the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’”**²³ Like the Pharisee, the tax collector is also praying, but he is standing a ways away. He knew to come to the temple, but he knew he didn’t belong there. He senses his unworthiness. He does not offer any personal accomplishments and he refuses to trust in himself. Additionally, instead of looking upward toward heaven and raising his hands, he is unwilling to even look up, indicating his humility.²⁴ Furthermore, this humble tax collector is beating his breast. And he is not beating his breast once or twice, but continually.²⁵ Since the heart is the source of sin, this is an act of grief or contrition (cf. Luke 23:48).²⁶ He is mourning over his sin. He is broken and he longs for forgiveness. So he begins crying out, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” This is a prayer of humility, dependence, and desperation.²⁷ The phrase, “be merciful” means “to appease.” This tax collector was asking for God’s anger to be removed.²⁸ He wants to be delivered from his sin. Please also notice that the tax collector calls himself “the sinner.”²⁹ He does not call himself “a sinner.”³⁰ Instead, he views himself as *the* vilest of the vile...the worst of all sinners.³¹

Today, guilt is unpopular; feeling “good about myself” is much more in fashion. Anyone found beating his breast in guilt is sent for counseling until such negative behavior is corrected. It’s not healthy to feel guilt. Humbling oneself is likewise not in vogue. The papers are full of advice that self-asserting behavior affirming oneself are the means to success. But God’s grace cannot be found without humility. It is essential to receiving mercy.³²

What a glaring contrast this parable is. The Pharisee thought of *others* as sinners. The tax collector thinks of *himself* alone as the sinner.³³ In fact, the tax collector does not think of others at all. The Pharisee was proud and confident; the tax collector grieved over his own sin. The Pharisee described his righteousness; the tax collector begged for mercy to escape the judgment he deserved.³⁴

Which of these two men do you relate with most? If you are like most Christians, you can relate with the Pharisee. It is easy to categorize various sin and rant against those sins that we don’t commit. “God, I thank you that I am not a homosexual.” “God, I thank you that I am not an adulterer.” “God, I thank you that I am not a child molester or rapist.” “God, I thank you that I have never killed anyone.” As we rattle off the sins that we consider the “biggies” it is easy to get puffed up when we can say that we haven’t committed such sins. Yet, we fail to own up to our own sins, which are also repulsive to God.

- Have you ever talked about a person behind his or her back?
- Have you ever launched into a fit of anger with your wife or one of your children?
- Have you ever prioritized watching your favorite sitcom over reading your Bible?
- Have you ever eaten too much and excused it?
- Have you ever found yourself gazing at Internet porn?
- Have you ever worried yourself to death instead of trusting the Lord?

In 18:14a, Jesus prepares to close His parable with a shocking declaration: “**I tell you**³⁵ [Pay attention! Are you listening?], **this man** [the tax collector, the most unlikely of all sinners] **went to his house justified**³⁶ [i.e., reckoned as righteous, acquitted of his sins] **rather than the other** [the Pharisee].” What a role reversal! The villain trumps the hero! The prayer that was heard and honored was the one given with humility. In a surprising reversal it was the tax collector who returned to his home justified. From his heart the storm has been removed. All is at peace now, for he is deeply convinced that God’s approval rests upon him. The Pharisee also goes home, but he has nothing! He might as well have stayed home that day, and never gone to the temple. In fact, this might have been better for him.³⁷

While I don’t believe that this parable is directly speaking about how to enter into a relationship with God, I acknowledge that there is a close connection between humility and faith. In fact, it’s impossible to know where one ends and the other begins. Biblical faith requires total humility and dependence because we must transfer our trust from ourselves to the Lord Jesus. If you have never believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior, will you humble yourself before Him? Will you stop trusting in your own goodness and trust in Him instead? Jesus promises that if you humble yourself before Him and trust in Him alone, He will credit your account with His perfect righteousness. Today, please believe in Christ as your Savior.

Jesus’ final words are both sobering and comforting: “**for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted**” (18:14b). The lesson, like so many in the Bible, is that God treats us the reverse of how the world does.³⁸ In the world, the one who humbles himself is left in the dust. He’s passed over for promotions, ignored, forgotten, and discarded. In the world, the one who exalts himself is noticed by others. He’s praised, remembered, and elected to office. But God is different. God exalts the humble and humbles the proud. God raises up those the world has forgotten and gives them a place of honor. He adds no glory to those who are proud of their own accomplishments.

Jesus calls for humility and condemns those seeking honor (cf. 14:11).³⁹ Jesus honors humility before God and confidence in His mercy—not in one’s own merit.⁴⁰ Humility is exalted in the parable, while pride—especially religious pride—is condemned. Humility before God is what He finds acceptable. Who gains God’s favor? The man, woman, or child who gains God’s favor is the one that exercises a humble heart. Today, Jesus declares to you and me, “***Get right by going low!***”

You may be wondering how the washcloth episode ended. Well, I’ll tell you. The entire time I was on campus, I was grieved by this incident. The attitude I displayed in the fitness center was anything but humble. Instead, I came face-to-face with my own pride. I searched my heart and recognized the evil that lies within my flesh. I had to come to grips with the fact that I believed I did not deserve to be treated so poorly. After all, I was a student who was paying for my classes, my room, and the use of the fitness center. In my self-righteous attitude, I was confident that I would not have made the same mistakes that conference services did. If I worked in conference services I would have been prepared for the arrival of the summer students. If I had worked at the fitness center I would not have provided a washcloth. I would have made sure that towels were available. I was the Pharisee.

While I had confessed my sinful attitude to the Lord, I never came across the student that I had sinned against. But on my final night, as the fitness center was closing, I talked with the other student that was working at the desk when I sounded off. I humbled myself before him and asked his forgiveness for my sinful attitude. (He said he hadn’t even noticed.) I told him that my attitude was not Christ-like and I needed to make things right. I then asked him if I could write a note to the young man I had spoken with. I asked for his name and this grad student told me that his name was “Shalom.” I said, “Shalom?” as in the Hebrew word “peace?” That’s right, the student replied. So I wrote a note to Shalom and confessed my pride and asked his forgiveness. While I left the fitness center embarrassed and humbled, I knew I had finally pleased the heart of God. I sensed His *shalom*—His peace and pleasure. What kind of attitude does God commend? The answer is clear: an attitude of humility. ***Get right by going low.***

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Weekly Scripture Reading

Luke 18:9-14
Luke 1:46-55
Ezekiel 21:24-27
1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Matthew 23:12
James 4:6, 10
1 Peter 5:5-7

Bulletin Questions

1. How would I rate my overall attitude toward God and others? On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest) how would I score my attitude? Can I provide concrete examples for why I scored so high or low? Would there be any variance in how my family, friends, coworkers, or fellow church members would rate me? If so, why would this be the case?
2. Jesus told this parable to some people who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt” (18:9). In what ways am I guilty of trusting in myself? How do I manifest a self-righteous attitude? When have I looked upon others with contempt?
3. How am I similar to the Pharisee (18:10-12)? What sin(s) am I proud of not committing? What religious works give me a sense of confidence? Who do I set as my behavioral standard? Is it worldly people, fellow believers, or God Himself?
4. When have I been like the tax collector (18:13)? How have I grieved over my sin? What outer expressions have demonstrated my humility before God and man? How do I currently perceive my own sin? Theologically, how can I balance the fact that I am a saint with a new nature, yet also sin in my fellowship with God?
5. God promises that if we humble ourselves, He will exalt us (18:14; see also Matt 23:12; Jas 4:6, 10; and 1 Pet 5:5-7). How can I humble myself before God and others? What does humility look like in my home, work, and church environment? Who do I know that exemplifies humility before God and man? What makes him or her stand out in my mind? Why does God value humility so much? What step(s) can I take to cultivate a humble heart?

Notes

¹ See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*: CGT (Exeter: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 677. The connection of this parable to the former one (Luke 18:1-8) is marked by Luke's use of the word "also" (*kai*) in 18:9. See Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*: NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 645.

² Luke often notes the target of Jesus' parables (e.g., 18:1; 19:11).

³ "Trusted in themselves" is a perfect participle, a tense that indicates a residing confidence that never wanes.

⁴ "Viewed others with contempt" is a strong word, which can also be translated "despised" or "rejected" (Luke 23:11; Acts 4:11; Rom. 14:3, 10).

⁵ The tenses of the Greek verbs in Luke 18:9 imply ongoing past action (one perfect and two present tense verbs). Thus, this verse can be literally translated, "And Jesus also told this parable to some people who were continually in a state of trusting in themselves that they were righteous, and continually viewing others with contempt."

⁶ In Luke 16:15, Jesus had this to say to the Pharisees: "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God."

⁷ In Luke 9:46-50, the disciples were arguing over which one of them was going to be the greatest. As a result, Jesus took a child and said, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great" (Luke 9:47-48).

⁸ Several of these insightful examples come from Craig L. Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 156-168.

⁹ The temple is on a hill in Jerusalem, so one would go up to enter its precincts.

¹⁰ The word "Pharisee" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "separated one."

¹¹ According to Josephus, Ant. 17.2.4 [17.42] there were more than 6,000 Pharisees at about this time. See NET Study Notes on Luke 5:17.

¹² E.g., Nicodemus, Simon, Levi, Zacchaeus. Stiller notes that the Jewish historian, Josephus, saw Pharisees as people known for their good deeds and love for the Scriptures. Brian C. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 140.

¹³ In this particular story, the tax collector in question is actually a "toll collector." The Greek word *telones* refers to a toll collector. Such a one operated booths along the road and did all that they could to cheat people out of their earnings. These toll collectors were even more despised than tax collectors. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, 136.

¹⁴ Cf. 1 Sam 16:7 "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'"

¹⁵ I mention these people because most evangelical Christians struggle with such individuals.

¹⁶ Standing was the common Jewish posture in prayer (Matt 6:5; Mark 11:25).

¹⁷ The prepositional phrase *pros eauton* ("to/about himself") could go with either the aorist participle *statheis* ("stood") or with the imperfect verb *proseoucheto* ("he prayed"). If taken with the participle, then the meaning would seem at first glance to be: "stood 'by himself,'" or "stood 'alone'." Now it is true that *pros* can mean "by" or "with" when used with intransitive verbs such as *histemi* ("I stand"); cf. BDAG 874 s.v. *pros*, j 2.a, but *pros eauton* together never means "by himself" or "alone" in biblical Greek. On the other hand, if *pros eauton* is taken with the verb, then two different nuances emerge, both of which highlight in different ways the principal point Jesus seems to be making about the arrogance of this religious leader: (1) "prayed to himself," but not necessarily silently, or (2) "prayed about himself," with the connotation that he prayed out loud, for all to hear. Since his prayer is really a review of his moral résumé, directed both at advertising his own righteousness and exposing the perversion of the tax collector, whom he actually mentions in his prayer, the latter option seems preferable. If this is the case, then the Pharisee's mention of God is really nothing more than a formality. See NET Study Notes.

¹⁸ Here the plural Greek term *anthropon* ("mankind") is used as a generic noun and can refer to both men and women (NASB, NRSV, "people"; NLT, "everyone else").

¹⁹ The Pharisees added others fasts, twice a week between Passover and Pentecost, and between tabernacles and dedication of the temple. These fasts normally took place on Monday and Thursday.

²⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*: ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1464.

²¹ See also R.T. Kendall, *The Complete Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2004), 304.

²² The Greek conjunction *de* ("but") makes a strong contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector.

²³ Pate writes, "It is interesting that four of the pivotal terms that Luke uses in vv. 13-14 also occur in the Pauline literature: "propitiation/mercy" (*hiastheti*; cf. v. 13 with Rom. 3:25); "righteousness" (*dikaiois*; cf. v. 14 with Rom. 3:21 and also Phil. 3:6, 9); "humble" (*tapeinothesetai*; cf. v. 14, and also 1:48, with Phil. 2:8); "exalted" (*hypson*; cf.

v. 14, and also 1:52, with Phil 2:9). This is to be expected of a man who was a companion to the great apostle Paul. One wonders if Paul himself, according to his testimony in Philippians 3:4-9, did not once fit the category of the self-righteous Pharisee, that is until he was humbled, like the toll collector, before God, on the road to Damascus.” See C. Marvin Pate, *Luke: Moody Gospel Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 340.

²⁴ The Greek text reads *ouk ethelen oude eparai* (lit. “was not willing even to lift up, refused to lift”). See the two negatives in this phrase (*ouk* and *oude*).

²⁵ The word “beating” (*etupte*, an imperfect active of *tupto*) can be rendered, “kept on beating or pounding.” The tense denotes continuous action.

²⁶ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 680; Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, 144.

²⁷ Ellisen suggests that he is quoting David’s words in Psalm 51. Stanley A. Ellisen, *Parables in the Eye of the Storm* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 211.

²⁸ The verb translated “be merciful” (*hilaskomai*) means to be appeased. The term is associated with the concept of a request for atonement (BDAG 473-74 s.v. 1; Ps 51:1, 3; 25:11; 34:6, 18). In the LXX (Greek OT), *hilaskomai* is used 21 times for the lid of the mercy seat. Ellisen notes that the aorist passive imperative form (*hilastheti*) asks God to “be propitiated” or satisfied concerning one’s sin on the basis of an appropriate sin offering, so that reconciliation might be effected, as Jesus the High Priest does in Heb 2:17 (the only other time the verbal form of this word is used). See Ellisen, *Parables in the Eye of the Storm*, 212.

²⁹ See E.X. Heatherly, *The Parables of Christ* (Austin: Balcony, 1997), 289 and Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 222-223. These words echo Paul’s declaration, “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Tim 1:15).

³⁰ It is curious how almost all of the major English versions ignore this Greek article (e.g., ESV, HSB, NIV, NRSV, NLT, KJV, NKJV). It is not “a sinner,” but “the sinner.” The main point in the contrast lies in this article. The Pharisee thought of others as sinners. The publican thinks of himself alone as the sinner, not of others at all. The Pharisee is placing himself in a class by himself; but he makes no comparisons.

³¹ This tax collector has defrauded his people, associated with the Gentiles in this evil scheme of tax collecting, and robbed the temple of its due taxes by forcing people to pay taxes rather than tithes. Thus, he is complicit in forcing people into a life of impurity because their tithe was not paid. Consequently, this tax collector ends up supporting the Roman occupation than the Jewish system. The irony is that he asks for forgiveness in the very place he has helped to desecrate. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, 144.

³² Bruce B. Barton, Dave Veerman, Linda K. Taylor, *Luke: Life Application Bible Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1997), 414.

³³ The difference between the two men is that the Pharisee is conscious of his “goodness” and the tax collector of his sinfulness. David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 140.

³⁴ See also Trent C. Butler, *Luke: HNTC* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 297. For a great breakdown, see the chart I have constructed from Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: Luke 12-24* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 2000), 74-75.

The Pharisee	The Tax Collector
He tried to pray.	He was ashamed of himself.
He honored God’s temple.	He said nothing about his good works.
He lived a moral life.	He was distressed about his sins.
He lived a disciplined life; he fasted.	He had faith.
He lived a generous life; he tithed.	He asked for mercy.

³⁵ Talbert further notes, “With the ‘I tell you’ of vs. 14a, Jesus claims to know God’s judgments and dares to say what God is like and how he acts. He claims to know the mind of God.” Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 172.

³⁶ The word “justified” (*dikaioo*) is often taken as a Pauline term (e.g., Rom 3:20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4:2, 5; Gal 3:24), yet it goes back to the OT (e.g., Ps 50:6; Isa 53:11). Bock makes this important distinction, “The term *dikaioo* is not here a technical term for final salvation since there are no soteriological issues raised other than a generalized request for mercy in the context of prayer. The tax collector’s prayer was accepted or ‘found favor’ in contrast to the Pharisee’s prayer. *Dikaioo* is forensic but not in the decisive sense. As such, it is like Paul’s usage, but less comprehensive in scope.” Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1465.

³⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Luke: New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 821.

³⁸ Spiritual reversal imagery is common in Luke's gospel (see also 6:20-26; 10:15; 29-37, 38-42; 11:37-41; 12:21; 15:11-32; 16:19-3; see esp. 1:51-53 and 14:11). Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1465.

³⁹ The saying in Luke 18:14 virtually matches 14:11, the only difference being the *kai de* variation in the last clause. Matt 18:14 and 23:12 are similar. The remark recalls Ezek 21:26. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1465.

⁴⁰ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1458.